



Photos by Staff Sgt. Molly Gilliam

Above, Mr. Don Trippy, 99th Communications Squadron chief of graphics, fires up the furnace to bring the temperature high enough to melt bronze to pour into the Eagle molds. Right, excess bronze and molding is ground off the Eagle's head in preparation for mounting and detail work. Volunteers from the 99th Communication Squadron will continue to work on the project, part time. Mr. Trippy estimates it should take about a year to complete the statue.

Forged in fire

Bronze statue will last a millennium

**By Ms. Martine Ramos
AWFC Public Affairs**

Mr. Don Trippy, 99th Communications Squadron's chief of presentation graphics, conceived, designed and is in the process of casting in bronze the eagle sculpture at the entrance of the United States Air Force Weapons School. The current statue, made from synthetic materials, was dedicated in 1999 as a tribute to the aircrews, attendees and graduates of the Weapons School who lost their lives training to fight for our nation.

Mr. Trippy has been sculpting in bronze for about 15 to 20 years. "I took a course at the University of Nevada Las Vegas and afterwards built my own furnace," Mr. Trippy said. "Originally I did all of my sculpting at Lorenzi Park in Las Vegas. The Desert Sculptors Organization was housed there, but when I lost use of that facility, I started working at UNLV and at a friend's foundry located not far from Nellis."

The total process of casting the sculpture in bronze will take Mr. Trippy about one year, working part time, and mainly

during personal off-duty time, with help from volunteers from the 99th Communications Squadron.

Completely decked out in a fire suit he will pour metal that has been heated to 2,200 degrees. The actual sculpting begins after the metal has cooled to about 1,800 degrees, usually taking a couple of hours.

When asked how it feels to be in that suit, Mr. Trippy said, "Hot. Incredibly hot, and there's very limited mobility."

When finished the sculpture will weigh about 1,000 pounds, and use about \$9,000 worth of materials. "Bronze sculptures last a lifetime. Exposure to the elements will eventually change the original patina, but artistically, that won't harm the appearance or value," Mr. Trippy said.

Some sculptors do not pour their own molds. According to Mr. Trippy, this is not the method of a true artist. "If you consider yourself a real sculptor, you need to pour the bronze yourself. This gives you a real feeling of creating something that will give pleasure to many people," he said.



Left, excess molten bronze is poured into an ingot and saved for a future project. Below, Mr. Trippy and a volunteer move the final bronze pour. The 50-pound cast will be worked and further refined once it has cooled.



Above, Mr. Trippy brings two pieces of the eagle's wing together flush at the ends in preparation for welding them together. Right, Airman 1st Class Shaketta Armstrong, 99th Communications Squadron graphic artist, cuts excess bronze off a piece of the eagle's wing as part of the finishing touches.

